

# **SOUTHWEST**

## **EXISTING LAND USE**

The Southwest sector is bound by the Route 460 Bypass to the east, the Glade/Westover neighborhood to the north, and the corporate limits to the west and south. The major urban feature in this area is the Hethwood planned development. Hethwood includes apartments primarily serving Virginia Tech students, townhouses, a section of moderately priced single-family homes, a section of high-end single-family homes, and a neighborhood commercial and professional office center to serve area residents. Other land uses outside the Hethwood planned development include two hotels at the Prices Fork/Route 460 interchange, a townhouse development, a church/day care center, medical offices, a fire station, Kipps Elementary School, and the Blacksburg Middle School. The dominant land use in the Southwest sector is agricultural or open, which constitutes approximately 75% of the total land area in the sector. Virginia Tech owns approximately 536 acres (47%) of the total 1,150 acres of open and agricultural land in the sector.

Significant natural features in this sector include Stroubles Creek and its associated floodplain, open and agricultural land, and views of Brush and Price's Mountains, which are located in Montgomery County. Stroubles Creek flows from the more developed sections of Town, to the Virginia Tech duck pond, through open land in the sector and eventually to the New River. Stroubles Creek will be a major feature in the town's greenway system if protected as surrounding property develops. The open land in this sector is well suited for development and is likely to develop as the demand for housing increases in Blacksburg.

## ***Unique Characteristics***

***A well-connected system of bike-walkways and recreation facilities are prominent features in Hethwood.*** Recreational amenities include a pond, playing fields, tennis and basketball courts, two pools, and tot lots. The multipurpose trail system connects to the campus bikeway system of Virginia Tech, providing convenient bicycle and pedestrian access to campus. The Huckleberry Trail is also planned to connect with the neighborhood trail system.

***Much of the natural beauty of the area is still present, including open space and pastures, agricultural land, good views of the surrounding mountains, mature trees and vegetation, and Stroubles Creek.*** The Creek Valley Overlay District will help to preserve significant portions of this area along with the dedication of other significant open space and adherence to strict development standards.

***The area is well maintained by homeowners associations, apartment managers, private landowners and the town government.*** The area is beautified through maintenance of grounds, landscaping, and seasonal plantings in median strips.

***Diverse groups of people live in Hethwood in various housing types including single-family homes, townhouses, condominiums, and apartments that are integrated into a cohesive community.*** This diversity is expected to continue as Virginia Tech's campus expands west of the Route 460 Bypass bringing additional faculty, staff, and students into the area to both live and work.

***A strong sense of community exists within the area and residents feel a high level of personal safety and neighborhood pride.*** The various homeowners associations communicate effectively with their residents and several successful neighborhood watch programs are active in the area.

***A neighborhood shopping center, a convenience store, and a child daycare facility serve the community and are in walking distance for most residents.*** Most services needed on a regular basis are provided within the community and more neighborhood-scaled commercial and civic developments are planned.

***Kipps Elementary and Blacksburg Middle School is located within walking distance for residents of Hethwood.*** The school also includes a community gymnasium and athletic fields for use by Blacksburg residents. The middle school will be operational in 2002 and provide the community with year-round access to its recreational and educational amenities.

***A fire station is located on Prices Fork Road, providing emergency service within minutes to the entire sector.*** The facility has room for expansion to include rescue vehicles and equipment along with the existing fire department assets. The town's fire museum is currently located at the station.

## ***Critical Issues***

***Traffic is an increasing problem in Hethwood.*** There are currently only two entrances to the community, both fronting Prices Fork Road. As the area develops, the Route 314 West extension to Merrimac Road will be critical to safe access to the community. Speeding is also a major safety issue that is being continually addressed by Town police and neighborhood residents.

***Southgate Drive is to be extended to Hethwood.*** A connection to this new road is planned at Tall Oaks Drive, and it will terminate at Merrimac Road. This road will improve access to existing development as well as to open areas. Improving access to these areas both in the town and the county is a prerequisite for future development of the area.

***The route approved by Congress for the proposed Interstate 73 is planned along the Route 460 Bypass corridor.*** If this interstate highway is to pass through Blacksburg, the existing Route 460 right-of-way should be used and impacts to Hethwood should be minimized.

***The community is divided into sections that are very homogeneous and buildings are not arranged to build a real sense of community in apartment areas.*** The different sections of the community operate as separate communities with little interaction between neighborhoods. Buildings are oriented to parking areas and not to each other or common community spaces.

***Open and agricultural areas comprise 75 percent of the land area of the Southwest sector.*** Development in these areas will have a significant impact on the character of the sector. These areas are community assets and as development occurs, measures should be taken to preserve significant open spaces.

***Virginia Tech owns a significant portion of the open and agricultural land in the sector.*** Their future use of this land will impact area residents. Long range plans include the expansion of the Corporate Research Center and possible mixed-use development. This area should be carefully planned and zoned in preparation for future university development and to retain as much open space as possible.

***Pressures may emerge to develop Price's Fork Road as a strip commercial area.*** Price's Fork road is not currently zoned for commercial uses; however, citizens expressed a concern that as the area develops, pressures for strip commercial development in this area would grow. The residents strongly oppose strip commercial development along Price's Fork Road, and support neighborhood oriented smaller scale commercial uses only.

***Conflicts between students and non-students could develop if student housing is constructed abutting single-family areas.*** These concerns are primarily based on lifestyle conflicts and noise exhibited around areas with high concentrations of college students.

***Development could encroach on Stroubles Creek.*** If the creek is not adequately protected, water quality could be adversely affected and an opportunity to preserve a significant greenway feature lost.

***Development in adjacent areas in Montgomery County will impact Hethwood residents.*** Development standards in the county and town must be coordinated on border areas. Development on Price's and Brush Mountains could impact scenic views from Blacksburg. Development on these slopes should be at a density of no greater than one unit per five acres in order to reduce the visual impact on the town.

## ***Neighborhoods***

The Southwest sector contains one planned residential area, a multi-family development, limited commercial, civic, and mixed-uses, surrounded by rural development. There is currently one neighborhood planning area containing at least seven discrete sections in this sector. The subdivisions within this planned area vary greatly in terms of median household income, home values, and owner vs. renter occupancy. The subdivisions comprising Hethwood include Mission Hills, Pilgrims Point, Stroubles Mill, Haymarket Square, and Fox Ridge. Oak Manor and Brightwood Manor lie directly adjacent to Hethwood along Prices Fork Road.

### **Hethwood**

The Hethwood community is the only neighborhood in the Southwest sector. This neighborhood is served by only one major street, Price's Fork Road, and is easily accessible to the Route 460 Bypass. This neighborhood is largest in Town with an eclectic mix of residents. Hethwood is almost a town unto itself and has several small commercial nodes that are neighborhood oriented.

The residential portion of the neighborhood is defined by a series of curving roads and cul-de-sac streets and has a large variety of housing styles and quality. The neighborhood is directly adjacent to the university academic campus, but no primary, direct access exists between this area and campus.

#### *Critical Neighborhood Issues*

- ◆ This neighborhood is very mobile, as it is largely comprised of university students, faculty, and staff. Improving pedestrian safety and access to the university is a major issue. Traffic through the neighborhood and along Price's Fork Road could be significantly reduced if a direct link to the university was provided via Southgate Drive.
- ◆ Hethwood has a comprehensive trail system that could be further enhanced with connections to the town and university trail system. Preservation of "the bowl" as a greenway with linkages to the private and public trail systems in the area is highly desired. This greenway could also serve as a natural buffer between existing and future development in the area.
- ◆ Speeding and associate traffic violations are a problem townwide. Residents feel that the quality of life within the neighborhood is being negatively affected by traffic violations. Reducing speeding and traffic violations on the collector and arterial roads surrounding the neighborhood via increased enforcement, physical traffic features, and innovative measures is critical to this neighborhood's quality-of-life. Roads of particular concern are Prices Fork Road, Heather Drive, and Hethwood Boulevard.
- ◆ Increases in the Virginia Tech enrollment could accelerate the conversion of properties from owner-occupied to rental housing. Minimizing the effect of off-campus student housing in low density residential areas through the NEP's rental permitting and code enforcement programs, and increasing landlord awareness toward code and nuisance related issues are major goals. Also, the development of the Heth property by the university should provide for a variety of residential housing and be done in a manner that preserves open space and keeps potentially conflicting residential lifestyles separate and adequately buffered.

## VISION

The Southwest sector contains a mix of rural and residential areas with working agricultural and open areas interspersed with residences. Many housing types exist, including large higher priced homes, smaller affordable homes, townhouses, and apartments. A variety of people reside in the area, including Virginia Tech students, families, professionals, and retirees, and are served by a community child day care facility. A strong sense of community and neighborhood pride exists. All sections of Hethwood are well maintained, landscaped, and decorated with seasonal plantings to enhance the natural beauty of the area.

Three commercial nodes exist; one at the interchange of Price's Fork Road and the Route 460 Bypass, one at the intersection of Price's Fork Road and Hethwood Boulevard, and a small node at the intersection of Tall Oaks Drive and Southgate Drive. The Price's Fork Road/Bypass node consists of uses that serve the town as a whole. The node at Prices Fork Road and Hethwood Boulevard provides uses to serve the whole sector. Businesses include a grocery store, drug store, a restaurant, and smaller specialty shops and businesses providing personal services for area residents. The node located at the intersection of Tall Oaks Drive and Southgate Drive consists of a small neighborhood convenience center, designed to fit in with the residential character of the area and serve residents of the immediate area.

The area to the west of Stroubles Mill subdivision is either a district park or a very low density, planned residential development. The area to the east of Stroubles Mill is a mixed planned development that includes areas of high and transitional residential, a small commercial node to serve area residents, university facilities, and part of the Corporate Research Center. The Stroubles Creek greenway is integrated into the development and acts as a natural buffer between different residential densities. Virginia Tech-owned agricultural areas are open and used for the raising of livestock, agricultural research, and recreation. Development in surrounding areas in Montgomery County is coordinated with the development pattern in Town. Hethwood residents enjoy scenic views of Price and Brush Mountains. Tree cover remains and the only development consists of scattered residential units on large lots.

Public parks and open spaces are located throughout the area and attract a wide range of users. Public areas include fields for active and organized recreational use, scenic natural areas for walking and

picnicking, and trails for walking, jogging, or cycling. Stroubles Creek remains in an open, natural state and runs through a surrounding greenway corridor. The Stroubles Creek Greenway is a valuable open space feature and is enjoyed by many Town residents. Community facilities exist to support indoor recreational activities such as basketball, volleyball, and physical fitness classes and cultural activities such as community art displays and classes, theater, and musical activities. Both senior and youth activities are provided at these facilities.

A public/private off-road trail system links all residential developments, commercial nodes, greenway areas, and the Virginia Tech campus. The trail system is convenient to residents and heavily used for short trips and commuting to Virginia Tech. Transportation access to the Hethwood area is convenient. Three major roads serve the area: Price's Fork Road, Southgate Drive, and Merrimac Road. Bicycle and pedestrian access to nearby destinations is safe and practical. Transit stops are located throughout the area.

### ***Special Considerations***

- ◆ Commercial uses should be designed to fit the character of the area in which they are located. Designs should seek to create a community gathering place as well as a commercial center. Commercial centers should be integrated with the surrounding residential area to provide convenient pedestrian access. Development should be appropriately screened and attractively constructed to preserve the view shed along the Prices Fork/Route 460 Bypass corridors.
- ◆ Planned residential development, with limited neighborhood commercial areas, should be encouraged on the properties to the north and south of existing Hethwood with accommodations for appropriate collector/access roads.
- ◆ If the Hethwood commercial node expands north of Price's Fork Road, the expansion should be approved only as a planned commercial development or as part of a larger planned residential community. Access to a commercial area on the north side of Price's Fork Road should only be from an extension of Hethwood Boulevard. No other direct access to Price's Fork Road from the commercial node should be approved, and site design characteristics should be strictly controlled.
- ◆ New multi-family residential areas should be arranged with the buildings oriented toward common areas to increase community interaction among residents and to de-emphasize parking lots. Multi-family areas should be sited to minimize conflicts between

student and non-student residential areas. The university should consider providing additional residential structures on land locally zoned, or otherwise appropriate, for such use.

- ◆ Innovative transportation modes should be considered for linking areas with high concentrations of Virginia Tech students, such as Fox Ridge, with the core campus.
- ◆ Bike-walkways and sidewalks should be extended into all new residential developments to encourage pedestrian circulation.
- ◆ The area south and west of Kipps elementary school and the middle school is well suited for the expansion of community facilities such as a district park for formal, active recreation, and should be seriously considered.
- ◆ Where sanitary sewer service is currently unavailable, developments should either provide for the ultimate connection to sanitary sewer when the system is available or provide a publicly approved decentralized wastewater system.
- ◆ The Creek Valley Overlay District is necessary to protect water quality and reduce the potential for contamination.
- ◆ Any land disturbing activities, fertilizer/herbicide application, or other possible sources of water contamination should be buffered an adequate distance from Stroubles Creek with natural vegetation to protect water quality.
- ◆ Land and/or trail easements should be acquired along Stroubles Creek to extend Hethwood's trail system to the town's greenway system.
- ◆ An Open Space Land Use Assessment tax break is needed to encourage the dedication of open space by large landowners.
- ◆ Development should be clustered on less than half of the site with the remainder of the site being reserved in permanent open space.
- ◆ Preservation of open space is a special consideration when reviewing development in the Southwest sector. Ridgelines, hilltops, land identified in the Greenway Master Plan, land adjacent to existing public parks, to existing preserved open space or to the Creek Valley Overlay is of significant value to the community. It may be appropriate to consider an increase in density for the development of a parcel where land of significant value off-site will be preserved as open space. This special consideration may only occur if the land is determined to be of significant value to the community and the additional density does



not compromise the integrity of the receiving site. Approximately three-quarters or more of the off-site parcel may be proffered as permanent open space.

- ◆ Both public and private efforts to preserve agricultural and open lands through land trusts, open space easements, purchase of development rights, and fee simple acquisition is strongly encouraged.
- ◆ Places of worship are shown on the future land use map in their 2001 locations, because they are important anchors in a neighborhood and should be retained. They are an appropriate use in most neighborhoods when developed at a scale consistent with the surrounding community, as allowed by special use permit. The town does not wish to limit future locations of places of worship to the indicated map areas.

### ***Changes From Existing Land Use Map***

- Future development adjacent to the Route 460 Bypass and Prices Fork Road interchange should be well planned to minimize deterioration of the viewscape. Appropriate screening and innovative construction are encouraged to preserve the view shed along these vital traffic corridors.
- Heather Drive's extension to Glade Road and the Southgate/314 West extension to Merrimac Road are important connector roads for this sector that will improve public safety and alleviate increasing traffic congestion.
- Stroubles Creek and its surrounding floodplain are designated as public greenway.
- Open agricultural land to the west of the Stroubles Mill subdivision is designated as a District Park or very, low density planned residential compatible with the adjacent residences.
- Open agricultural lands to the east of Stroubles Mill subdivision and to the north of Oak Manor are designated as pockets of medium and high density planned residential with greenway areas separating the different densities.
- Land designated as Very Low Density Residential may be included in a Conservation Overlay, Planned Residential, or Rural Residential zoning district.
- A Conservation Overlay District may include limited very low-density residential development, recreation areas, agricultural land, and open space.